

or appointed to office; and he must swear that he has not done so and so before the oath was adopted. That is certainly *ex post facto*, retrospective and retroactive, and so far, it is in violation of one of the first principles not only of the constitution of Maryland, but of the constitution of the United States.

Swearing has of late become so fashionable in Maryland—the fashion having being inaugurated by the present federal administration, that the State has become famous for oaths. I will not say infamous; I do not mean that it has become infamous; because the State of Maryland has been powerless to protect itself against the invader of her rights. Oaths have been forced upon her citizens, when it was the duty of the executive to protect them. They have been incarcerated for refusing to take them. They have been liberated when they have taken them. All kinds of arbitrary acts and outrages have been perpetrated against the citizens of the State, in the clear and undoubted exercise of their privileges and rights as citizens under the constitution of the State and of the United States.

Yet gentlemen get up here and defend the administration with all the earnestness of the advocate. No fault can be found. Every act is justified. Every step taken they say is of necessity. Everything is justified by the plea of military necessity; because it all comes back to that grand plea, that covers every act of usurpation and outrage upon the rights of the citizen.

That has been the plea of tyranny from the earliest ages to the present time; and it is now the only plea by which gentlemen attempt to justify many of the acts perpetrated by the present administration. We of the minority are found fault with and criticised because we do not denounce the other side. Now it happens that they are not within our rule. They are beyond the reach of our censure or denunciation. Let us come a little nearer home and point out defects and wrongs and outrages, too numerous to mention, that are constantly striking at our rights at home. Let us first cleanse our own stables, before we go abroad. It is unnecessary to go beyond the Potomac to denounce acts of rebellion against the government, when we have so many glaring acts of usurpation at home. It is unnecessary for any man to go beyond the Potomac, when we consider the rights nearer and dearer to us at home, which we wish to save and rescue from being abandoned and lost forever.

We are upon the very verge of ruin now; and nothing but the hope held out in November next, can save us from the ruin which is now almost engulfing us. There is no salvation for the country but by a change of rulers. That salvation cannot come by the reelection of the present incumbent of the presidential chair. His re-election cannot but

result in the complete and utter destruction of everything valuable in our form of government. That is my opinion. I believe it as firmly as I ever believed any truth in my life. A peace President is the only President who can save the liberties which are left and restore what we have lost. A peace President, during the course of the discussion this morning, has been unsparingly denounced. "Peace upon any terms," except the abject submission of the South, has been denounced. I would not have a dishonorable peace; nor do I suppose that a dishonorable peace would be likely to be obtained. I could not point out what peace could be obtained. I could not pretend to indicate what negotiations might be entered into. There are wise men, however—great statesmen, still, I trust, in the country, that are competent, whenever the people are disposed to inaugurate such an effort, to carry it successfully through.

Mr. SANDS. May I ask my friend one single question upon the subject? Would he be willing to accept any peace which involved the destruction of American nationality?

Mr. DENT. I would not be willing to accept a peace which would involve the destruction of American nationality; but American nationality does not consist in the lines which surround the whole of these States, as they once existed. We can have constitutional liberty within the State of Maryland, as free, as enjoyable, as if it embraced in scope the globe. Constitutional liberty does not apply to geographical lines. It may apply to half a dozen States, or a hundred States. The principle of government would be the same, whether in a small country or a large country. Constitutional liberty is the grand object to be attained, and to be preserved, without special reference to geographical lines. Constitutional liberty and self-government constitute the basis of American nationality.

With regard to the war, as a means of restoring the Union, which has been much discussed, I have taken the position from the start, that the means resorted to by the federal administration for the purpose of restoring the Union, are destructive of the government as organized by the constitution. So I believe to-day. I will read by way of reminder, and not because gentlemen have not seen it before, a paragraph from the letter of acceptance from Edward Everett when nominated in 1856, as candidate for Vice-President in connection with Mr. Fillmore:

"The suggestion that the Union can be maintained by the numerical predominance and military prowess of one section, exerted to coerce the other into submission, is, in my judgment, as self-contradictory, as it is dangerous. It comes loaded with the death-smell from fields wet with brothers' blood. If the vital principle of all republican governments